

HOMELESSNESS IN NICEVILLE

Confidential Instructions for the Representative of the Homeless Union

As a founding member of the Homeless Union, you have an important part to play in any decision made today. You represent the union, but as a former homeless person you also represent the interests of the homeless population directly. You have developed, with the Union, a system of self-improvement based on discipline. Members of the union are forced to stop all substance abuse and to conform to a strict regimen that instills self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Your group is also active in promoting political awareness of homeless issues. You count among your personal successes generating the publicity that helped force the Governor to create the Task Force on Homelessness. However, you feel that the governor should have made you a member of the Task Force.

As a veteran you feel strongly that the government should be involved in providing services for the homeless. However, you feel that the Third Avenue Service Center is needlessly bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of its residents. You feel that the center, and other services for the homeless, can be run more successfully by the homeless themselves. The operator of the Center has always reacted defensively toward the Union.

For eight years your organization has run a hot meal program in Straley Park. Food is donated from local restaurants and grocery stores and cooked using equipment that was donated by local charities. The union has a permit from the Municipal Government to use the park. You view any move to shut down this service as a hostile act. However, the union would be willing to make changes in the program if a better alternative emerged.

The union proposes the creation of a shelter run by the homeless themselves. The present shelter and government programs are run by people too far removed to understand the best ways to help the homeless. A new initiative should create a shelter controlled and run by the homeless. The union needs \$500,000 start up-money for a self-run and self-financed forty-bed homeless facility. Government-financed shelters are unsafe and unstructured. Shelter providers are paternal, more concerned with their institution than with the people they are supposed to serve. The union would run a shelter based on self-help and strict substance abuse programs; homeless volunteers would staff and run the facility. You are willing to have a smaller shelter, but it is important to make clear that the union is capable of running a shelter of significant size. You know from personal experience that the "official" statistics on homeless underestimate the true homeless population. The union is in the process of choosing possible sites for the new shelter,



including an unoccupied residential apartment building and a hotel building.

The foundation is an excellent source of funds because it will not try and take control of the program. The union's priorities are to prove its administrative ability and to take a more active role in the homeless community. The school building is a good site for the new shelter, but the union differs greatly with the Community Service League on how the shelter should be run. In your opinion the league's goal of self-reliance though nurturing is paternalistic and disempowers the homeless. The union could accept sharing responsibility for the shelter with the league, as long as the union's core values of discipline and self-reliance are followed.

Your bottom line is that the union must play an active role in the administration of either a new shelter or food service and job training program. You are willing to settle on fewer than forty new beds, but remember that emergency service needs cannot be overlooked. Nights that the shelter is at full capacity, there are people out on the streets.